

E-356,722

S-572,583

SEP 24 1967

CIA INTERESTED IN CHAIR WITH LIE DETECTOR

Chicago Daily News-Post-Dispatch
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WASHINGTON, Sept. 23 —
The "wobble seat," which must
rank as one of the most unusual
and expensive chairs in the his-
tory of furniture, is being devel-
oped under the direction of the
Central Intelligence Agency.

This electronic device looks
like an ordinary office chair.
But the unwar y person who
takes a seat and begins to
answer questions may then be
subjected, without his knowl-
edge, to a lie-detector examina-
tion.

The project, in which both the
CIA and the National Security
Agency have shown intense in-
terest, is officially secret. A
CIA spokesman, when asked
about it, declined to comment.

But several sources have con-
firmed that the CIA, through
contracts channeled to private
industry by the Department of
Defense, is pushing develop-
ment of the device.

The matter came to public
view as the Senate was debat-
ing Senator Sam J. Ervin's
"bill of rights" for Government
employees. The bill, which was
passed by the Senate 79 to 4,
sharply limits the use of lie-
detector, or polygraph, tests by
Government agencies, including
CIA and NSA.

Called Witchcraft

The North Carolina Demo-
crat, who is scornful of poly-
graph tests and refers to them
as "twentieth century witch-
craft," told the Senate that the
CIA was developing "a lie-
detecting machine by means of
which a person can be tested
without his knowledge."

In an exchange with Senator
Ralph Yarborough (Dem.), Tex-
as, Ervin quipped, "If the Sen-
ator has any contact with the
CIA, he had better be careful of
where he sits . . . It grieves me
to think that the security of the
United States is in the hands of
men who place their faith in the
polygraph machine and the
"wobble seat." "

CIA interest in such a device
goes back at least five years,
reliable sources said. It could
not be learned whether the so-
called "wobble seat" has actual-
ly been put to work by the na-
tion's intelligence agencies, but
a number of private companies,
who hold research and develop-
ment contracts from the De-
fense Department, are known to
be working on various aspects
of the problem.

The Philco-Ford Corp. has
just put on the market a device
called "MediScreen," which
comes close to fitting Ervin's
definition of a "wobble seat."

The new Philco product, de-
veloped under contracts with
the National Aeronautics and
Space Administration and the
Air Force, looks like an ordi-
nary cushioned office chair —
with one exception. An instru-
ment box protrudes from the
chair's back. The person being
tested must keep his hands in
contact with metal plates on the
arms of the chair.

This device, which costs
\$5250, is offered by Philco for a
variety of medical diagnostic
tests that might be performed
in a hospital, clinic or private
doctor's office.

But a Philco brochure, which
mentions the lie-detector appli-
cation only in passing, does em-
phasize: "Nothing intrudes on
the serenity of the setting. The
patient does not see, much less
wear, an electrode — straps
and wires are prominent only
by their absence."

Adaptation Sought

D. Scott Hindley, Philco's di-
rector of market planning in
Washington, confirmed that the
company was exploring ways to
adapt the "MediScreen" device
so that the unknowing subject
of a polygraph test would think
he was sitting in an ordinary
chair.

This is difficult, Hindley ex-
plained, because accurate read-
ings of blood pressure, respira-
tion and other elements of poly-
graph tests are more difficult
when electrodes must be hidden
in the seat and back of the
chair.

Philco's work on such a
chair, he insisted, is not being
sponsored by any Government
agency, including the CIA. But
he admitted that Philco had
been in contact with certain un-
named "classified" Government
agencies about its work in this
field.

Another company interested
in what Senator Ervin called
the "wobble seat" is Space/De-
fense Corp. of Birmingham,
Mich.

Malcolm Ross, the firm's
president, said, in a telephone
interview that the company had
developed a workable poly-
graph chair but found no custo-
mers for it.

Space/Defense Corp. does
business with such Government
agencies as NASA, the Army,
the Air Force and the Office of
Naval Research. Ross said no
Government agency had ever
shown any interest in the poly-
graph chair.

"We'd like to have a custom-
er," Ross said, "but there was
no customer for it."

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